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**BROWNING'S ESSAY
ON SHELLEY**

BROWNING'S ESSAY ON SHELLEY

*BEING HIS INTRODUCTION TO
THE SPURIOUS SHELLEY LETTERS*

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION,
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INTRODUCTION

IN one of the dramatic fragments of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, perhaps the modern English poet who has best succeeded in clothing striking imagery in pregnant phrase, we read—

“His thoughts are so much higher than his state,
That, like a mountain hanging o’er a hut,
They chill and darken it.”

The simile not inaptly describes Browning’s relation to the spurious Shelley letters edited by him. His conception of the editorial function far transcended that of the commonplace individual who would have deemed it before all things incumbent upon him to inform the reader what the letters were and how they were authenticated, and to give some account of the circumstances under which they were

probably written, and of the persons to whom they were addressed. These considerations were altogether too sublunary for Browning, part of whose introduction is occupied by a disquisition, interesting in itself but devoid of special reference to Shelley, upon the objective and subjective aspects of poetical genius ; the other with remarks upon Shelley, highly just and rational, but which might with almost equal propriety have been prefixed to any other of his writings.

In one point of view this lax construction of editorial obligations was fortunate for Browning, since, the letters being fabrications, any special pains he might have bestowed upon them would have been thrown away, and any elaborate comment would have subjected him to ridicule. On the other hand, had he made any investigation of them in their relation to Shelley's authentic letters, a man of his acuteness could hardly have failed to discover their spuriousness,

and he would thus have obviated a painful literary scandal. In this case, however, we should have lost his introduction—a document of much interest as an exposition of his views on the objective and subjective elements in poetry, as a testimony of his appreciation of Shelley, and as his sole important composition in prose. We design to offer a few remarks upon it in each of these aspects.

Distinguishing between two leading classes of poets, the objective, or those who sing of what is external to themselves ; and the subjective, who, though frequently under transparent disguises, reveal themselves to the world, Browning justly maintains that the biography, including the correspondence, of the latter class is the more important, inasmuch as it is the more essential to the comprehension of the man and his work. After admitting that the details of the life of an objective poet may be “fraught with instruction and interest,” he adds—

“Still, we can, if needs be, dispense with them. The man passes, the work remains. The work speaks for itself, as we say; and the biography of the worker is no more necessary to the understanding or enjoyment of it than is a model or anatomy of some tropical tree to the right tasting of the fruit we are familiar with on the market stall, or a geologist’s map and stratification to the prompt recognition of the hill-top, our land-mark of every day.”

The man, that is to say, is in this instance externalised in his work, which becomes almost independent of the man. In the case of the subjective poet, man and work are deeply interknit, and one is scarcely intelligible without the other. Here, therefore, the revelation of character through biography or correspondence becomes highly important. The conclusion is just. It is hardly likely that the fullest acquaintance with the sayings and doings of Homer would contribute much to the elucidation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; and the interest with which we follow the his-

tories of less purely objective poets like Dante and Goethe is rather from sympathy with the men than from the expectation of additional light upon their works. But almost every additional scrap of information upon subjective writers like Byron and Shelley has profited the study of the poet no less than of the man.

It would be interesting to ascertain whether Browning considered himself in the light of an objective or a subjective poet. His evident preference for the latter type implies that he would have wished to belong to it, and he certainly would have been so classed if he had written nothing but his *Paracelsus*. Such a view, however, would hardly be tenable in the face of his dramas, and still less of his dramatic monologues and lyrics, where he has represented a vast variety of personages differing in all respects from each other and widely remote from his own type of character. He may have had an idea that he was destined to exemplify

in his own person the feasibility in modern times of a perfect union of the contrasted types. "Nor is there," he says, "any reason why these two modes of poetic faculty may not issue hereafter from the same poet in successive perfect works, examples of which, according to what are now considered the exigences of art, we have hitherto possessed in distinct individuals only." There is nothing unreasonable in this anticipation. The great development of introspection in modern times increases the probability of its being found in union with a genius for objective treatment. In few poets since Shakespeare have the power of external representation and the capacity for psychological analysis approximated more markedly than in Browning : and it might hardly be too much to claim as applicable to himself his own metaphor of "the perfect shield, with the gold and the silver side set up for all comers to challenge."

It has been said that every man is either

a Platonist or an Aristotelian—mainly swayed, that is, by ideas, or else by facts. This distinction corresponds to that between the subjective and objective poet traced by Browning in this essay. Ideas are so ethereal in comparison to hard prosaic fact that one naturally expects to find poets, generally speaking, among the Platonists, and perceives with surprise that those whom the world has agreed to place in the very highest rank—Homer, the Greek dramatists, Lucretius, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe—have without exception been objective poets, inspired by abstract ideas, no doubt, but delighting in the description of externalities and in concrete imagery, and, with the exception of the last three among them in their early writings, uncommunicative respecting themselves. Compare them with Petrarch and Wordsworth, whose poems are seldom devoid of some personal reference, disguised as this frequently may be, and unless one is prepared to put Petrarch and Wordsworth

in the front rank, it will be needful to admit that the power of moulding the external world into poetry is greater than that of interpreting it ; and that although the minute analysis of emotion, now so greatly in fashion, may prove the proficient a virtuoso, it is the power of calling up the lively image of another being that authenticates the poet.

It is a further point in favour of the objective poet that in his highest development he possesses the gift of analysis equally with the subjective minstrel, while the latter at his best is rarely a creator. The fact that *Hamlet* and *King John* proceeded from the same hand is conclusive of the co-existence of these powers in Shakespeare, while the former of these plays is perhaps the only one among his works in which the subjective element can be said to predominate. As we have remarked, however, the circumstances of later ages are favourable to the development of a mixed type. Our "enterprises of great pith and moment" are accompanied by far more introspection than

those of our ancestors were : we think and talk more about them, even after they have gained instead of lost "the name of action." Posterity, contemplating the magnificent series of portraits of great men of the present day with which Mr. Watts has adorned the National Portrait Gallery, will opine them to be one and all pondering the riddle of the painful earth : and although much is no doubt due to the idiosyncrasy of the painter, the idiosyncrasy of the sitter counts also. It is not then surprising that the two chief poets of the period should combine the power of delineating moods with that of delineating action to a degree unknown in former ages.

This is especially the case with Browning, "a subtle-souled psychologist" if any man ever was, but whose works are at the same time a gallery of figures extraneous to the actual experience and the mental constitution of the author himself. As an editor and preface-writer he must be censured as neither sufficiently subjective

nor sufficiently objective. His psychological faculty seems comparatively in abeyance ; and he does not lay hold of the little points of contact with the actual Shelley which the letters, however erroneously, were believed by him to afford. His own remonstrance might be turned against himself—

“Ah ! did you once see Shelley plain ?

And did he stop and speak to you ?

And did you speak to him again ?

How strange it seems, and new !

But you were living before that,

And you are living after :

And the memory that I started at—

My starting moves your laughter.

I crossed a moor with a name of its own,

And a use in the world, no doubt ;

Yet a handsbreadth of it shines alone

Mid the blank miles round about.

For there I picked up on the heather,

—Picked up, and put into my breast,

A moulted feather, an eagle's feather :

—Well, I forget the rest.”

It is true that the spurious letters have

more affinity to the blank miles than to the feather of the bird of Jove ; but, as we shall have occasion to show, Browning might have made them a link of connection with something infinitely more valuable.

Passing from general considerations to the more restricted subject of Shelley as revealed in his correspondence, Browning does not conceal his opinion that the letters by themselves hardly deserved an elaborate preface. He speaks of "arranging these few supplementary letters" (which he cannot have done, as the order is the obvious one of chronology) "with a recognition of the value of the whole collection," that is, of the inestimable collection published by Mrs. Shelley in 1840. A full recognition from Browning's pen of the unparalleled splendour and beauty of these letters would indeed have been precious, but it would have made his preface longer than his text, and we may be satisfied with his treatment of the only point considered by him. He renders emphatic testimony to the

transparent sincerity of Shelley's letters, regarded as an expression of the writer's inner nature, and justly infers a like sincerity in the poems. "The musician speaks on the note he sings with ; there is no change in the scale, as he diminishes the volume into familiar intercourse." In a previous part of the essay, he had indicated this wholeness of soul as the true criterion of the really great subjective poet, and had gone so far as to declare, not less rightly than boldly, that "the unmistakeable quality of the verse would be evidence enough, under ordinary circumstances" (he seems to make an exception in Shelley's case on account of the special virulence of his calumniators), "not only of the kind and degree of the intellectual, but of the moral constitution of Shelley." Unfortunately he seems to have shifted his ground at a later period, and to have tested the poetry by the man instead of the man by the poetry. Mrs. Sutherland Orr, at all events, informs us that, having subse-

quently come to think less favourably of Shelley's mortal part, Browning simultaneously brought down the immortal Shelley from the rank of a poet to that of a poetical artist. The manifest error of such a conclusion should have warned him that he was on a wrong track, and that the high poetical character of Shelley's writings is much better authenticated than any gossip about his actions. If he found the two sets of facts irreconcilable, the perception that Shelley's poetry at any rate was unassailable should have compelled him to renounce the doctrine of this essay, and to deny the necessary correspondence of the natures of poetry and poet; but such a recantation would have been a moral impossibility for him.

Perhaps the truest moral to be deduced from Browning's abortive preface is that the poet who possesses Shelley's genuine letters (and what poet does not?) should always carry them about with him. We vehemently suspect that Browning had

omitted this precaution, otherwise his references would have been less general. He will no more pin himself down to a direct quotation than the fabricator will compromise himself by mention of a circumstance which he might be proved to have misapprehended. It is true that occurrences incapable of being brought into connection with the things of the spirit had little interest for Browning, but he might, without protracting his essay to a disproportionate length, have demonstrated, instead of merely asserted, the degree in which Shelley's spiritual progress is mirrored in his correspondence. It is indeed the case that his resources in this department were inferior to ours, for Jefferson Hogg had not yet revealed the extravagant folly of Shelley's boyish letters. But even in those published by Mrs. Shelley the path is ever one of progress —

“Ascending ever, leaving far away
Avernian vales and Stygian lakes below.”

This is partly obscured by the splendour of the descriptive letters to Peacock coming about the middle of the series, which are naturally regarded as Shelley's highest efforts in the epistolary style. So they are as regards mere beauty of language, but in later examples, treating of more familiar themes and consequently less elaborate and ambitious, there prevails a purity, a clarity, a transparency more distinctly expressive of the mind within, and bringing to the mind Poe's description of Helen with the lamp—

“There, in that brilliant window-niche,
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand,
Ah! Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land!”

We have spoken of Browning's essay as abortive, and so, promptly recalled from circulation, for a time it was. But it was a soul independent of the inanimate body into which, as in the Indian legend, it had fortuitously entered. Not only does it

treat of Shelley with justice and insight, if less fully than might have been desired, but it has a special interest as by far the most important specimen we possess of the prose of the author: for the apparently more elaborate *Life of Strafford* which Browning wrote for his friend Forster is little but a collection of excerpts from indigestible State papers.

It is also an exemplification of his method as a literary workman. Apparently he wrote prose very much as he wrote poetry, with great labour as regarded the evocation of his thought, and little or none as regarded its display to the best advantage. He dives deep for pearls, but too often leaves them in the shell. He has no idea of balance and proportion, but goes on heaping thought upon thought as a child piles toy bricks one upon another, until the entire edifice is in danger of collapse. Yet, involved and unwieldy as his sentences commonly are, the bulky mass frequently enshrines miniature master-

pieces of phraseology, felicitous brevities, full of pith and moment, and sudden flashes of epigram. The subjective poet "is rather a seer than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence." He "selects that silence of the earth and sea in which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart." In the sincere poet "there is no dropping of the tragic mask, as the crowd melts away." Passages like these exemplify an interesting predisposition of the poetical temperament, whether endowed or unendowed with the accomplishment of verse, the tendency to translate the abstract into the concrete, and make reasoning as it were visible and tangible by sensuous imagery. The following passage, but for its inferiority in rhythmical charm, might have come from the pen of James Martineau—

"Did the personality of such an one stand like an open watch-tower in the midst of the territory it is erected to gaze on, and were the storms and calms, the stars and

meteors, its watchman was wont to report of, the habitual variegation of his every-day life, as they glanced across its open roof or lay reflected on its four-square parapet?"

It will be proper to give some account of the forgeries which Browning was misled into accrediting as editor. They, as well as some deceptive transcripts, all but facsimiles, purchased by Sir Percy Shelley, who afterwards discovered that he had the originals, and a still greater amount of fabricated matter relating to Byron, fortunately exposed in time to prevent publication, were manufactured by a person who assumed Byron's name, and, perhaps with warrant, claimed to be his natural son. They were between 1848 and 1850 gradually disposed of to Mr. White, bookseller in Pall Mall, by this man's wife or mistress, who represented them to be the property of an invalid sister. Mr. White was no doubt at first an innocent victim, but had evidently come to entertain suspicions which it was his duty to have confirmed or cleared

up. Instead of this he sent the letters to be sold by auction, where those with which we are concerned were purchased by Edward Moxon, "the publisher of poets and the poet of publishers," which certainly would not have happened if he had known, as Mr. White knew, that they came from the so-called Byron, who was already in the black books of the Tradesmen's Protection Society. There was nothing in the external appearance of the letters to excite suspicion ; the paper was old, or made to appear so ; some trifling but damning errors in post-marks required a Post-office expert to detect them ; the handwriting could only be proved a counterfeit by careful comparison with a mass of genuine correspondence. Some of the letters, indeed, though none of those purchased by Moxon, were all but facsimiles of the genuine documents, from which they had been laboriously copied. It is no wonder that, so long as the letters were in the auction room, Moxon should think that he was making a good speculation by

acquiring them, and doing Browning a good turn by entrusting him with the editorship. Browning was in England in the summer of 1851, when the proposal may have been made to him. In the autumn he proceeded to Paris, where his introduction was written in the first days of December, amid the excitement of the Bonapartist *coup d'état*, no doubt from proofs sent out to him. It is not certain that he had ever seen the manuscripts, but if he had there was nothing in their appearance to awake suspicion. The book was published at the beginning of 1852, and was duly reviewed by the critical journals, with some expressions of disappointment at its poverty of interest, but without a word of scepticism. It was comfortably taking its place as a minor classic, when lo ! the dramatic discovery of Francis Turner Palgrave of *Golden Treasury* fame, who, taking up a copy from Tennyson's table, was confounded to encounter an extract from a memorable article in the *Quarterly Review*

by his own father, in the shape of a letter from Shelley to Godwin, dated twenty-one years previously. A fact like this is indeed a stubborn thing. Ere long Sara Coleridge recognised in another epistle the clumsy would-be humour of "Janus Weathercock," and others, not demonstrably appropriations, proved to be vulnerable in the postmark. Two, however, were copies of genuine letters, though not made directly from the originals: that to Laurence on his *Empire of the Nairs* (August 17, 1812), and that to Keats (July 27, 1820), inviting him to Italy, which had been published by Lewes in the *Westminster Review* for 1841, and was still in his possession when he reviewed the fabricated letters there in 1852. The forgers appear to have proceeded about this time to the United States, a fact to be borne in mind by American collectors of Byron-Shelley- and Keatsiana.

The supposititious letters, after abstracting the two copies of genuine letters,

amount to twenty-three. They extend from Shelley's residence at Oxford in 1811 to his residence at Pisa in 1821. Their general agreement with the facts of Shelley's life justifies the conclusion that they were fabricated after these had become known from Mrs. Shelley's biographical notes in her edition of Shelley's works in 1839. It might be difficult to adduce positive internal evidence of forgery, beyond those instanced above, except the certainly sufficient one that the seven letters to Edward Graham are addressed throughout in a wrong Christian name. It might be added that the two dated from Bath at the end of January and beginning of February 1817, are supposed to be written when Shelley was no longer there: he had, however, departed so recently that the forger must have been fairly well acquainted with his movements. The damning circumstance is not so much the frequency of erroneous particulars as the dearth of any particulars at all. Scarcely one of Shelley's genuine

letters is so devoted to the things of the spirit as not to impart some tangible piece of information. The forger is so careful to avoid getting out of his depth that he never enters the water, and would have us believe that Shelley wrote twenty-three letters without revealing a single fact respecting himself—an impossible supposition. No explanation is vouchsafed of the manner in which so many letters, written to such various persons at such different periods, came into one hand. Upon this Moxon and Browning certainly ought to have insisted. It is to be remarked, however, that many of the letters sold at the auction, though not purchased by Moxon, were really pregnant with information, being copies of genuine letters which had for a while gone astray, but had in the interim been recovered by Mrs. or by Sir Percy Shelley. The history of the loss is known, but how the forger obtained an opportunity of counterfeiting the documents remains matter of conjecture. They had been left

in Peacock's charge when the Shelleys quitted Marlow, and he, upon his own removal to London, thoughtlessly left them in the custody of Shelley's landlord, Maddocks, who pretended that they were collateral security for a debt, and in some way disposed of them. These afforded the copies purchased at the auction by Sir Percy Shelley, who afterwards found that he or Mrs. Shelley had already recovered the originals. They formed, however, but a small part of the mass of Marlow documents. The present writer, some thirty years ago, had the satisfaction of redeeming and restoring to the family a number of MSS., entirely literary, which are now in the Bodleian.

Browning suffered for his inattention to the ordinary duties of an editor. If, as already remarked, he had investigated the letters in connection with the correspondence already published, he could hardly have helped conceiving suspicions. Some circumstances, indeed, would not have im-

pressed him as they impress us. He could not have realised, as we do, the moral impossibility of Shelley's writing to Godwin from the Continent without some allusion to the subject of money. He could hardly have been aware that Shelley's correspondence with Hookham ceased after his elopement with Mary Godwin. If he did not know, and probably he did not, that Longdill was Shelley's attorney, he would be less amazed at the Poet's rhapsodical effusiveness towards the Philistine. If, notwithstanding, he had made the comparison with the authentic letters which he ought to have done, he must have noticed one of the most certain signs of fabrication in the frequent engrafting of phrases from the latter, in order to impart a Shelleian flavour to the novelties, an achievement of which the forger, a master in the mechanical part of his profession, was otherwise incapable. Thus, in a letter professedly addressed to Godwin from Geneva, occurs a striking phrase from a letter really written at the

same time and place by Mary Shelley, and printed as hers years before. The curious expression, "I have contrived to get my musical coals at Newcastle itself" is borrowed from a letter to Horace Smith to impart *vraisemblance* to one addressed to an entirely imaginary "Marlow." The extraordinary abruptness with which the letters in general begin might also have aroused suspicion, as well as the evasion of reference to those matters of fact which might have given the literary detective a handle. They are commonly mere harangues. On the whole, the publication must be said to have done little honour to the critical acumen of Moxon or Browning, and still less to that of Chorley and the other reviewers, who had more time for investigation, and a more ample critical *supellex*. As we have intimated, Browning, writing in Paris, had probably no access to Shelley's authentic letters; his own copy would be at Florence, and it is dubious whether the Bibliothèque Nationale, which thirty years afterwards had still to

acquire Jefferson Hogg's *Life of Shelley*, could have provided him with another. Nor does he seem to have taken his work too seriously. "You will not be sorry," says Mrs. Browning, writing to John Kenyon, "to have Robert's preface thrown in, though he makes very light of it himself." He thought enough of it, however, to forward copies to Mrs. Jameson and Barry Cornwall, but it appears from Mrs. Browning's letter, stating the circumstance, that in so doing he exhausted the exiguous store of copies allotted him by Moxon, and apparently he did not care to procure another.

It may be added, since the circumstance has not hitherto been made public, that Moxon, hardly able to credit the spuriousness of the letters even after Mr. Palgrave's exposure, and the Post-office verdict on the postmarks, laid them before Peacock for his opinion. Peacock says, in a memorandum on the subject, "Mr. Moxon, having brought to me the letters

which he had purchased as letters of Shelley, requested my opinion of their genuineness. Comparing them with others in my possession, I had no doubt of their being forgeries. They were well enough executed to impose on recollection, but not on comparison.

“ Mr. Moxon having expressed a wish to publish the few inedited letters in my possession in the place of those which had been proved to be forgeries, I have placed them in his hands for that purpose. They are of the same character as those published by Mrs. Shelley, and serve, as in the instance of the letter from Naples, to complete the series of Shelley’s local observations.”

For some unknown reason the contemplated publication by Moxon did not take place. The letters appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine* for March 1860; and have since been incorporated into the complete editions of Shelley’s works, and into Sir Henry Cole’s edition of Peacock.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

[DEC. 1851]

AN opportunity having presented itself for the acquisition of a series of unedited letters by Shelley, all more or less directly supplementary to and illustrative of the collection already published by Mr. Moxon, that gentleman has decided on securing them. They will prove an acceptable addition to a body of correspondence, the value of which towards a right understanding of its author's purpose and work, may be said to exceed that of any similar contribution exhibiting the worldly relations of a poet whose genius has operated by a different law.

Doubtless we accept gladly the biography of an objective poet, as the phrase now goes ; one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the

manifested action of the human heart and brain) with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men, assumed capable of receiving and profiting by this reproduction. It has been obtained through the poet's double faculty of seeing external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply, than is possible to the average mind, at the same time that he is so acquainted and in sympathy with its narrow comprehension as to be careful to supply it with no other materials than it can combine into an intelligible whole. The auditory of such a poet will include, not only the intelligences which, save for such assistance, would have missed the deeper meaning and enjoyment of the original objects, but also the spirits of a like endowment with his own, who, by means of his abstract, can forthwith pass to the reality it was made from, and either corroborate their impressions of things known already, or supply themselves with new from what-

ever shows in the inexhaustible variety of existence may have hitherto escaped their knowledge. Such a poet is properly the ποιητής, the fashioner; and the thing fashioned, his poetry, will of necessity be substantive, projected from himself and distinct. We are ignorant what the inventor of "Othello" conceived of that fact as he beheld it in completeness, how he accounted for it, under what known law he registered its nature, or to what unknown law he traced its coincidence. We learn only what he intended we should learn by that particular exercise of his power,—the fact itself,—which, with its infinite significances, each of us receives for the first time as a creation, and is hereafter left to deal with, as, in proportion to his own intelligence, he best may. We are ignorant, and would fain be otherwise.

Doubtless, with respect to such a poet, we covet his biography. We desire to look back upon the process of gathering together in a lifetime, the materials of the

work we behold entire ; of elaborating, perhaps under difficulty and with hindrance, all that is familiar to our admiration in the apparent facility of success. And the inner impulse of this effort and operation, what induced it ? Did a soul's delight in its own extended sphere of vision set it, for the gratification of an insuppressible power, on labour, as other men are set on rest ? Or did a sense of duty or of love lead it to communicate its own sensations to mankind ? Did an irresistible sympathy with men compel it to bring down and suit its own provision of knowledge and beauty to their narrow scope ? Did the personality of such an one stand like an open watch-tower in the midst of the territory it is erected to gaze on, and were the storms and calms, the stars and meteors, its watchman was wont to report of, the habitual variegation of his everyday life, as they glanced across its open roof or lay reflected on its four-square parapet ? Or did some sunken and darkened chamber

of imagery witness, in the artificial illumination of every storied compartment we are permitted to contemplate, how rare and precious were the outlooks through here and there an embrasure upon a world beyond, and how blankly would have pressed on the artificer the boundary of his daily life, except for the amorous diligence with which he had rendered permanent by art whatever came to diversify the gloom? Still, fraught with instruction and interest as such details undoubtedly are, we can, if needs be, dispense with them. The man passes, the work remains. The work speaks for itself, as we say : and the biography of the worker is no more necessary to an understanding or enjoyment of it, than is a model or anatomy of some tropical tree, to the right tasting of the fruit we are familiar with on the market-stall,—or a geologist's map and stratification, to the prompt recognition of the hill-top, our land-mark of every day.

We turn with stronger needs to the

genius of an opposite tendency—the subjective poet of modern classification. He, gifted like the objective poet with the fuller perception of nature and man, is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below, as to the One above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth,—an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul. Not what man sees, but what God sees—the *Ideas* of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand—it is toward these that he struggles. Not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity he has to do ; and he digs where he stands,—preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak. Such a poet does not deal habitually with the picturesque groupings and tempestuous tossings of the forest-trees, but with their

roots and fibres naked to the chalk and stone. He does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes : we must look deep into his human eyes, to see those pictures on them. He is rather a seer, accordingly, than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence. That effluence cannot be easily considered in abstraction from his personality,—being indeed the very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated. Therefore, in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality of the poet ; in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him. Both for love's and for understanding's sake we desire to know him, and as readers of his poetry must be readers of his biography also.

I shall observe, in passing, that it seems not so much from any essential distinction in the faculty of the two poets or in

the nature of the objects contemplated by either, as in the more immediate adaptability of these objects to the distinct purpose of each, that the objective poet, in his appeal to the aggregate human mind, chooses to deal with the doings of men (the result of which dealing, in its pure form, when even description, as suggesting a describer, is dispensed with, is what we call dramatic poetry), while the subjective poet, whose study has been himself, appealing through himself to the absolute Divine mind, prefers to dwell upon those external scenic appearances which strike out most abundantly and uninterruptedly his inner light and power, selects that silence of the earth and sea in which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart, and leaves the noisy, complex, yet imperfect exhibitions of nature in the manifold experience of man around him, which serve only to distract and suppress the working of his brain. These opposite tendencies of genius will be more readily

descried in their artistic effect than in their moral spring and cause. Pushed to an extreme and manifested as a deformity, they will be seen plainest of all in the fault of either artist, when subsidiarily to the human interest of his work his occasional illustrations from scenic nature are introduced as in the earlier works of the originative painters—men and women filling the foreground with consummate mastery, while mountain, grove and rivulet show like an anticipatory revenge on that succeeding race of landscape-painters whose “figures” disturb the perfection of their earth and sky. It would be idle to inquire, of these two kinds of poetic faculty in operation, which is the higher or even rarer endowment. If the subjective might seem to be the ultimate requirement of every age, the objective, in the strictest state, must still retain its original value. For it is with this world, as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the

world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilised, but the raw material it operates upon, must remain. There may be no end of the poets who communicate to us what they see in an object with reference to their own individuality; what it was before they saw it, in reference to the aggregate human mind, will be as desirable to know as ever. Nor is there any reason why these two modes of poetic faculty may not issue hereafter from the same poet in successive perfect works, examples of which, according to what are now considered the exigences of art, we have hitherto possessed in distinct individuals only. A mere running-in of the one faculty upon the other, is, of course, the ordinary circumstance. Far more rarely it happens that either is found so decidedly prominent and superior, as to be pronounced comparatively pure: while of the perfect shield, with the gold and

the silver side set up for all comers to challenge, there has yet been no instance. Either faculty in its eminent state is doubtless conceded by Providence as a best gift to men, according to their especial want. There is a time when the general eye has, so to speak, absorbed its fill of the phenomena around it, whether spiritual or material, and desires rather to learn the exacter significance of what it possesses, than to receive any augmentation of what is possessed. Then is the opportunity for the poet of loftier vision, to lift his fellows, with their half-apprehensions, up to his own sphere, by intensifying the import of details and rounding the universal meaning. The influence of such an achievement will not soon die out. A tribe of successors (Homerides) working more or less in the same spirit, dwell on his discoveries and reinforce his doctrine ; till, at unawares, the world is found to be subsisting wholly on the shadow of a reality, on sentiments diluted

from passions, on the tradition of a fact, the convention of a moral, the straw of last year's harvest. Then is the imperative call for the appearance of another sort of poet, who shall at once replace this intellectual rumination of food swallowed long ago, by a supply of the fresh and living swathe ; getting a new substance by breaking up the assumed wholes into parts of independent and unclassed value, careless of the unknown laws for recombining them (it will be the business of yet another poet to suggest those hereafter), prodigal of objects for men's outer and not inner sight, shaping for their uses a new and different creation from the last, which it displaces by the right of life over death,—to endure until, in the inevitable process, its very sufficiency to itself shall require, at length, an exposition of its affinity to something higher,—when the positive yet conflicting facts shall again precipitate themselves under a harmonising law, and one more degree will be apparent

for a poet to climb in that mighty ladder, of which, however cloud-involved and undefined may glimmer the topmost step, the world dares no longer doubt that its gradations ascend.

Such being the two kinds of artists, it is naturally, as I have shown, with the biography of the subjective poet that we have the deeper concern. Apart from his recorded life altogether, we might fail to determine with satisfactory precision to what class his productions belong, and what amount of praise is assignable to the producer. Certainly, in the face of any conspicuous achievement of genius, philosophy, no less than sympathetic instinct, warrants our belief in a great moral purpose having mainly inspired even where it does not visibly look out of the same. Greatness in a work suggests an adequate instrumentality ; and none of the lower incitements, however they may avail to initiate or even effect many considerable displays of power, simulating the nobler

inspiration to which they are mistakenly referred, have been found able, under the ordinary conditions of humanity, to task themselves to the end of so exacting a performance as a poet's complete work. As soon will the galvanism, that provokes to violent action the muscles of a corpse, induce it to cross the chamber steadily : sooner. The love of displaying power for the display's sake, the love of riches, of distinction, of notoriety,—the desire of a triumph over rivals, and the vanity in the applause of friends,—each and all of such whetted appetites grow intenser by exercise and increasingly sagacious as to the best and readiest means of self-appeasement,—while for any of their ends, whether the money or the pointed finger of the crowd, or the flattery and hate to heart's content, there are cheaper prices to pay, they will all find soon enough, than the bestowment of a life upon a labour, hard, slow, and not sure. Also, assuming the proper moral aim to have produced a work, there are

many and various states of an aim : it may be more intense than clear-sighted, or too easily satisfied with a lower field of activity than a steadier aspiration would reach. All the bad poetry in the world (accounted poetry, that is, by its affinities) will be found to result from some one of the infinite degrees of discrepancy between the attributes of the poet's soul, occasioning a want of correspondency between his work and the verities of nature,—issuing in poetry, false under whatever form, which shows a thing not as it is to mankind generally, nor as it is to the particular describer, but as it is supposed to be for some unreal neutral mood, midway between both and of value to neither, and living its brief minute simply through the indolence of whoever accepts it, or his incapacity to denounce a cheat. Although of such depths of failure there can be no question here, we must in every case betake ourselves to the review of a poet's life ere we determine some of the nicer questions

concerning his poetry,—more especially if the performance we seek to estimate aright, has been obstructed and cut short of completion by circumstances,—a disastrous youth or a premature death. We may learn from the biography whether his spirit invariably saw and spoke from the last height to which it had attained. An absolute vision is not for this world, but we are permitted a continual approximation to it, every degree of which in the individual, provided it exceed the attainment of the masses, must procure him a clear advantage. Did the poet ever attain to a higher platform than where he rested and exhibited a result? Did he know more than he spoke of?

I concede however, in respect to the subject of our study as well as some few other illustrious examples, that the unmistakeable quality of the verse would be evidence enough, under usual circumstances, not only of the kind and degree of the intellectual but of the moral constitution

of Shelley: the whole personality of the poet shining forward from the poems, without much need of going further to seek it. The "Remains"—produced within a period of ten years, and at a season of life when other men of at all comparable genius have hardly done more than prepare the eye for future sight and the tongue for speech—present us with the complete enginery of a poet, as signal in the excellence of its several adaptitudes as transcendent in the combination of effects,—examples, in fact, of the whole poet's function of beholding with an understanding keenness the universe, nature and man, in their actual state of perfection in imperfection,—of the whole poet's virtue of being untempted by the manifold partial developments of beauty and good on every side, into leaving them the ultimates he found them,—induced by the facility of the gratification of his own sense of those qualities, or by the pleasure of acquiescence in the short-comings of his predecessors in

art, and the pain of disturbing their conventionalisms,—the whole poet's virtue, I repeat, of looking higher than any manifestation yet made of both beauty and good, in order to suggest from the utmost actual realisation of the one a corresponding capability in the other, and out of the calm, purity and energy of nature, to reconstitute and store up for the forthcoming stage of man's being, a gift in repayment of that former gift, in which man's own thought and passion had been lavished by the poet on the else-incompleted magnificence of the sunrise, the else-uninterpreted mystery of the lake,—so drawing out, lifting up, and assimilating this ideal of a future man, thus descried as possible, to the present reality of the poet's soul already arrived at the higher state of development, and still aspirant to elevate and extend itself in conformity with its still-improving perceptions of, no longer the eventual Human, but the actual Divine. In conjunction with which noble and rare

powers, came the subordinate power of delivering these attained results to the world in an embodiment of verse more closely answering to and indicative of the process of the informing spirit (failing as it occasionally does, in art, only to succeed in highest art),—with a diction more adequate to the task in its natural and acquired richness, its material colour and spiritual transparency,—the whole being moved by and suffused with a music at once of the soul and the sense, expressive both of an external might of sincere passion and an internal fitness and consonancy,—than can be attributed to any other writer whose record is among us. Such was the spheric poetical faculty of Shelley, as its own self-sufficing central light, radiating equally through immaturity and accomplishment, through many fragments and occasional completion, reveals it to a competent judgment.

But the acceptance of this truth by the public, has been retarded by certain

objections which cast us back on the evidence of biography, even with Shelley's poetry in our hands. Except for the particular character of these objections, indeed, the non-appreciation of his contemporaries would simply class, now that it is over, with a series of experiences which have necessarily happened and needlessly been wondered at, ever since the world began, and concerning which any present anger may well be moderated, no less in justice to our forerunners than in policy to ourselves. For the misapprehensiveness of his age is exactly what a poet is sent to remedy; and the interval between his operation and the generally perceptible effect of it, is no greater, less indeed, than in many other departments of the great human effort. The "*E pur si muove*" of the astronomer was as bitter a word as any uttered before or since by a poet over his rejected living work, in that depth of conviction which is so like despair.

But in this respect was the experience

of Shelley peculiarly unfortunate—that the disbelief in him as a man, even preceded the disbelief in him as a writer ; the misconstruction of his moral nature preparing the way for the misappreciation of his intellectual labours. There existed from the beginning,—simultaneous with, indeed anterior to his earliest noticeable works, and not brought forward to counteract any impression they had succeeded in making,—certain charges against his private character and life, which, if substantiated to their whole breadth, would materially disturb, I do not attempt to deny, our reception and enjoyment of his works, however wonderful the artistic qualities of these. For we are not sufficiently supplied with instances of genius of his order, to be able to pronounce certainly how many of its constituent parts have been tasked and strained to the production of a given lie, and how high and pure a mood of the creative mind may be dramatically simulated as the poet's habitual and exclusive one.

The doubts, therefore, arising from such a question, required to be set at rest, as they were effectually, by those early authentic notices of Shelley's career and the corroborative accompaniment of his letters, in which not only the main tenor and principal result of his life, but the purity and beauty of many of the processes which had conduced to them, were made apparent enough for the general reader's purpose,—whoever lightly condemned Shelley first, on the evidence of reviews and gossip, as lightly acquitting him now, on that of memoirs and correspondence. Still, it is advisable to lose no opportunity of strengthening and completing the chain of biographical testimony; much more, of course, for the sake of the poet's original lovers, whose volunteered sacrifice of particular principle in favour of absorbing sympathy we might desire to dispense with, than for the sake of his foolish haters, who have long since diverted upon other objects their obtuseness or malignancy. A full life of

Shelley should be written at once, while the materials for it continue in reach ; not to minister to the curiosity of the public, but to obliterate the last stain of that false life which was forced on the public's attention before it had any curiosity on the matter,—a biography, composed in harmony with the present general disposition to have faith in him, yet not shrinking from a candid statement of all ambiguous passages, through a reasonable confidence that the most doubtful of them will be found consistent with a belief in the eventual perfection of his character, according to the poor limits of our humanity. Nor will men persist in confounding, any more than God confounds, with genuine infidelity and an atheism of the heart, those passionate, impatient struggles of a boy towards distant truth and love, made in the dark, and ended by one sweep of the natural seas before the full moral sunrise could shine out on him. Crude convictions of boyhood, conveyed in imperfect and inapt

forms of speech,—for such things all boys have been pardoned. There are growing-pains, accompanied by temporary distortion, of the soul also. And it would be hard indeed upon this young Titan of genius, murmuring in divine music his human ignorances, through his very thirst for knowledge, and his rebellion, in mere aspiration to law, if the melody itself substantiated the error, and the tragic cutting short of life perpetuated into sins, such faults as, under happier circumstances, would have been left behind by the consent of the most arrogant moralist, forgotten on the lowest steps of youth.

The responsibility of presenting to the public a biography of Shelley, does not, however, lie with me : I have only to make it a little easier by arranging these few supplementary letters, with a recognition of the value of the whole collection. This value I take to consist in a most truthful conformity of the Correspondence, in its limited degree, with the moral and intel-

lectual character of the writer as displayed in the highest manifestations of his genius. Letters and poems are obviously an act of the same mind, produced by the same law, only differing in the application to the individual or collective understanding. Letters and poems may be used indifferently as the basement of our opinion upon the writer's character ; the finished expression of a sentiment in the poems, giving light and significance to the rudiments of the same in the letters, and these, again, in their incipency and unripeness, authenticating the exalted mood and reattaching it to the personality of the writer. The musician speaks on the note he sings with ; there is no change in the scale, as he diminishes the volume into familiar intercourse. There is nothing of that jarring between the man and the author, which has been found so amusing or so melancholy ; no dropping of the tragic mask, as the crowd melts away ; no mean discovery of the real motives of a life's achievement,

often, in other lives, laid bare as pitifully as when, at the close of a holiday, we catch sight of the internal lead-pipes and wood-valves, to which, and not to the ostensible conch and dominant Triton of the fountain, we have owed our admired waterwork. No breaking out, in household privacy, of hatred, anger and scorn, incongruous with the higher mood and suppressed artistically in the book : no brutal return to self-delighting, when the audience of philanthropic schemes is out of hearing : no indecent stripping off the grander feeling and rule of life as too costly and cumbrous for every-day wear. Whatever Shelley was, he was with an admirable sincerity. It was not always truth that he thought and spoke ; but in the purity of truth he spoke and thought always. Everywhere is apparent his belief in the existence of Good, to which Evil is an accident ; his faithful holding by what he assumed to be the former, going everywhere in company with the tenderest pity for those acting or suffer-

ing on the opposite hypothesis. For he was tender, though tenderness is not always the characteristic of very sincere natures ; he was eminently both tender and sincere. And not only do the same affection and yearning after the well-being of his kind, appear in the letters as in the poems, but they express themselves by the same theories and plans, however crude and unsound. There is no reservation of a subtler, less costly, more serviceable remedy for his own ill, than he has proposed for the general one ; nor does he ever contemplate an object on his own account, from a less elevation than he uses in exhibiting it to the world. How shall we help believing Shelley to have been, in his ultimate attainment, the splendid spirit of his own best poetry, when we find even his carnal speech to agree faithfully, at faintest as at strongest, with the tone and rhythm of his most oracular utterances ?

For the rest, these new letters are not offered as presenting any new feature of

the poet's character. Regarded in themselves, and as the substantive productions of a man, their importance would be slight. But they possess interest beyond their limits, in confirming the evidence just dwelt on, of the poetical mood of Shelley being only the intensification of his habitual mood ; the same tongue only speaking, for want of the special excitement to sing. The very first letter, as one instance for all, strikes the key-note of the predominating sentiment of Shelley throughout his whole life—his sympathy with the oppressed. And when we see him at so early an age, casting out, under the influence of such a sympathy, letters and pamphlets on every side, we accept it as the simple exemplification of the sincerity, with which, at the close of his life, he spoke of himself, as—

“ One whose heart a stranger's tear might wear
As water-drops the sandy fountain stone ;
Who loved and pitied all things, and could moan
For woes which others hear not, and could see
The absent with the glass of phantasy,

And near the poor and trampled sit and weep,
 Following the captive to his dungeon deep—
 One who was as a nerve o'er which do creep
 The else-unfelt oppressions of this earth."

Such sympathy with his kind was evidently developed in him to an extraordinary and even morbid degree, at a period when the general intellectual powers it was impatient to put in motion, were immature or deficient.

I conjecture, from a review of the various publications of Shelley's youth, that one of the causes of his failure at the outset, was the peculiar *practicalness* of his mind, which was not without a determinate effect on his progress in theorising. An ordinary youth, who turns his attention to similar subjects, discovers falsities, incongruities, and various points for amendment, and, in the natural advance of the purely critical spirit unchecked by considerations of remedy, keeps up before his young eyes so many instances of the same error and wrong, that he finds himself unawares

arrived at the startling conclusion, that all must be changed—or nothing : in the face of which plainly impossible achievement, he is apt (looking perhaps a little more serious by the time he touches at the decisive issue) to feel, either carelessly or considerately, that his own attempting a single piece of service would be worse than useless even, and to refer the whole task to another age and person—safe in proportion to his incapacity. Wanting words to speak, he has never made a fool of himself by speaking. But, in Shelley's case, the early fervour and power to *see*, was accompanied by as precocious a fertility to *contrive* : he endeavoured to realise as he went on idealising ; every wrong had simultaneously its remedy, and, out of the strength of his hatred for the former, he took the strength of his confidence in the latter—till suddenly he stood pledged to the defence of a set of miserable little expedients, just as if they represented great principles, and to an attack upon various

great principles, really so, without leaving himself time to examine whether, because they were antagonistical to the remedy he had suggested, they must therefore be identical or even essentially connected with the wrong he sought to cure,—playing with blind passion into the hands of his enemies, and dashing at whatever red cloak was held forth to him, as the cause of the fireball he had last been stung with—mistaking Churchdom for Christianity, and for marriage, “the sale of love” and the law of sexual oppression.

Gradually, however, he was leaving behind him this low practical dexterity, unable to keep up with his widening intellectual perception ; and, in exact proportion as he did so, his true power strengthened and proved itself. Gradually he was raised above the contemplation of spots and the attempt at effacing them, to the great Abstract Light, and, through the discrepancy of the creation, to the sufficiency of the First Cause. Gradually he was learning

that the best way of removing abuses is to stand fast by truth. Truth is one, as they are manifold ; and innumerable negative effects are produced by the upholding of one positive principle. I shall say what I think,—had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians ; his very instinct for helping the weaker side (if numbers make strength), his very “ hate of hate,” which at first mistranslated itself into delirious Queen Mab notes and the like, would have got clearer-sighted by exercise. The preliminary step to following Christ, is the leaving the dead to bury their dead—not clamouring on his doctrine for an especial solution of difficulties which are referable to the general problem of the universe. Already he had attained to a profession of “ a worship to the Spirit of good within, which requires (before it sends that inspiration forth, which impresses its likeness upon all it creates) devoted and disinterested homage, *as Coleridge says*,”—and Paul likewise. And we find in one of

his last exquisite fragments, avowedly a record of one of his own mornings and its experience, as it dawned on him at his soul and body's best in his boat on the Serchio—that as surely as

“The stars burnt out in the pale blue air,
And the thin white moon lay withering there—
Day had kindled the dewy woods,
And the rocks above, and the stream below,
And the vapours in their multitudes,
And the Apennine's shroud of summer snow—
Day had awakened all things that be ;”

just so surely, he tells us (stepping forward from this delicious dance-music, choragus-like, into the grander measure befitting the final enunciation),

“All rose to do the task He set to each,
Who shaped us to his ends and not our own ;
The million rose to learn, and One to teach
What none yet ever knew or can be known.”

No more difference than this, from David's pregnant conclusion so long ago !

Meantime, as I call Shelley a moral man, because he was true, simple-hearted, and

brave, and because what he acted corresponded to what he knew, so I call him a man of religious mind, because every audacious negative cast up by him against the Divine, was interpenetrated with a mood of reverence and adoration,—and because I find him everywhere taking for granted some of the capital dogmas of Christianity, while most vehemently denying their historical basement. There is such a thing as an efficacious knowledge of and belief in the politics of Junius, or the poetry of Rowley, though a man should at the same time dispute the title of Chatterton to the one, and consider the author of the other, as Byron wittily did, “really, truly, nobody at all.”¹ There is even such a

¹ Or, to take our illustrations from the writings of Shelley himself, there is such a thing as admirably appreciating a work by Andrea Verocchio,—and fancifully characterising the Pisan Torre Guelfa by the Ponte a Mare, black against the sunsets,—and consummately painting the islet of San Clemente with its penitentiary for rebellious priests, to the west between Venice and the Lido—while you believe the first to

thing, we come to learn wonderingly in these very letters, as a profound sensibility and adaptitude for art, while the science of the percipient is so little advanced as to admit of his stronger admiration for Guido (and Carlo Dolce !) than for Michael Angelo. A Divine Being has Himself said, that "a word against the Son of man shall be forgiven to a man," while "a word against the Spirit of God" (implying a general deliberate preference of perceived evil to perceived good) "shall not be forgiven to a man." Also, in religion, one earnest and unextorted assertion of belief should outweigh, as a matter of testimony, many assertions of unbelief. The fact that there is a gold-region is

be a fragment of an antique sarcophagus,—the second, Ugolino's 'Tower of Famine' (the vestiges of which should be sought for in the Piazza de' Cavalieri)—and the third (as I convinced myself last summer at Venice), San Servolo with its madhouse—which, far from being "windowless," is as full of windows as a barrack.

established by the finding of one lump, though you miss the vein never so often.

Shelley died before his youth ended. In taking the measure of him as a man, he must be considered on the whole and at his ultimate spiritual stature, and not be judged of at the immaturity and by the mistakes of ten years before : that, indeed, would be to judge of the author of "Julian and Maddalo" by "Zastrozzi." Let the whole truth be told of his worst mistake. I believe, for my own part, that if anything could now shame or grieve Shelley, it would be an attempt to vindicate him at the expense of another.

In forming a judgment, I would, however, press on the reader the simple justice of considering tenderly his constitution of body as well as mind, and how unfavourable it was to the steady symmetries of conventional life ; the body, in the torture of incurable disease, refusing to give repose to the bewildered soul, tossing in its hot fever of the fancy,—and the laudanum—

bottle making but a perilous and pitiful truce between these two. He was constantly subject to "that state of mind" (I quote his own note to "Hellas") "in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensation, through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought, and excess of passion animating the creations of the imagination : " in other words, he was liable to remarkable delusions and hallucinations. The nocturnal attack in Wales, for instance, was assuredly a delusion ; and I venture to express my own conviction, derived from a little attention to the circumstances of either story, that the idea of the enamoured lady following him to Naples, and of the " man in the cloak " who struck him at the Pisan post-office, were equally illusory,—the mere projection, in fact, from himself, of the image of his own love and hate.

"To thirst and find no fill—to wail and wander
With short unsteady steps—to pause and ponder—

To feel the blood run through the veins and tingle
What busy thought and blind sensation mingle,—
To nurse the image of *unfelt caresses*
Till dim imagination just possesses
The half-created shadow"—

of unfelt caresses,—and of unfelt blows as well : to such conditions was his genius subject. It was not at Rome only (where he heard a mystic voice exclaiming, "Cenci, Cenci," in reference to the tragic theme which occupied him at the time),—it was not at Rome only that he mistook the cry of "old rags." The habit of somnambulism is said to have extended to the very last days of his life.

Let me conclude with a thought of Shelley as a poet. In the hierarchy of creative minds, it is the presence of the highest faculty that gives first rank, in virtue of its kind, not degree ; no pretension of : a lower nature, whatever the completeness of development or variety of effect, impeding the precedency of the rarer endowment though only in the germ.

The contrary is sometimes maintained ; it is attempted to make the lower gifts (which are potentially included in the higher faculty) of independent value, and equal to some exercise of the special function. For instance, should not a poet possess common sense ? Then the possession of abundant common sense implies a step towards becoming a poet. Yes ; such a step as the lapidary's, when, strong in the fact of carbon entering largely into the composition of the diamond, he heaps up a sack of charcoal in order to compete with the Koh-i-noor. I pass at once, therefore, from Shelley's minor excellences to his noblest and predominating characteristic.

This I call his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws, from his poet's station between both, swifter, subtler, and more numerous films for the connexion of each with each, than have been thrown by any modern

artificer of whom I have knowledge ;
proving how, as he says,

“The spirit of the worm within the sod,
In love and worship blends itself with God.”

I would rather consider Shelley's poetry as a sublime fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal, than I would isolate and separately appraise the worth of many detachable portions which might be acknowledged as utterly perfect in a lower moral point of view, under the mere conditions of art. It would be easy to take my stand on successful instances of objectivity in Shelley : there is the unrivalled “Cenci ;” there is the “Julian and Maddalo” too ; there is the magnificent “Ode to Naples :” why not regard, it may be said, the less organised matter as the radiant elemental foam and solution, out of which would have been evolved, eventually, creations as

perfect even as those? But I prefer to look for the highest attainment, not simply the high,—and, seeing it, I hold by it. There is surely enough of the work “Shelley” to be known enduringly among men, and, I believe, to be accepted of God, as human work may; and around the imperfect proportions of such, the most elaborated productions of ordinary art must arrange themselves as inferior illustrations.

It is because I have long held these opinions in assurance and gratitude, that I catch at the opportunity offered to me of expressing them here; knowing that the alacrity to fulfil an humble office conveys more love than the acceptance of the honour of a higher one, and that better, therefore, than the signal service it was the dream of my boyhood to render to his fame and memory, may be the saying of a few, inadequate words upon these scarcely more important supplementary letters of SHELLEY.

PARIS, *Dec. 4th, 1851.*

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